

Streeterville lot must be cleared of radioactive dirt

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ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

Although there's little risk to the public, the government is ordering the owner of a Streeterville parking lot to remove radioactive dirt that lies below the asphalt.

Consultants began taking soil samples Monday to determine how much dirt is radioactive. Excavation of the parking lot at 316 E. Illinois will begin in about six weeks, and radioactive dirt will be shipped to a Utah landfill.

The work is to be completed by late November, said spokesman John Perrecone of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

A defunct lantern manufacturer, Lindsay Light Co., once leased a building on the site. The company made mantles for gas lanterns, and

the mantles contained thorium, a radioactive metal.

In 1936, Lindsay Light moved to suburban West Chicago, where low-level radioactive thorium waste was spread all over town. Kerr-McGee, a successor company to Lindsay Light, is paying for a clean-up in West Chicago.

Kerr-McGee also will help pay for the Streeterville cleanup. It will share the bill, estimated at between \$1 million and \$5 million, with the parking lot's owner, Chicago Dock and Canal Trust.

"There will be no cost to the American public," Perrecone said.

Twelve spots on the public parking lot have elevated levels of radioactivity. In the unlikely event a motorist happened to park above one of those spots every work day for a year, and took 30 minutes a day getting into and out of his



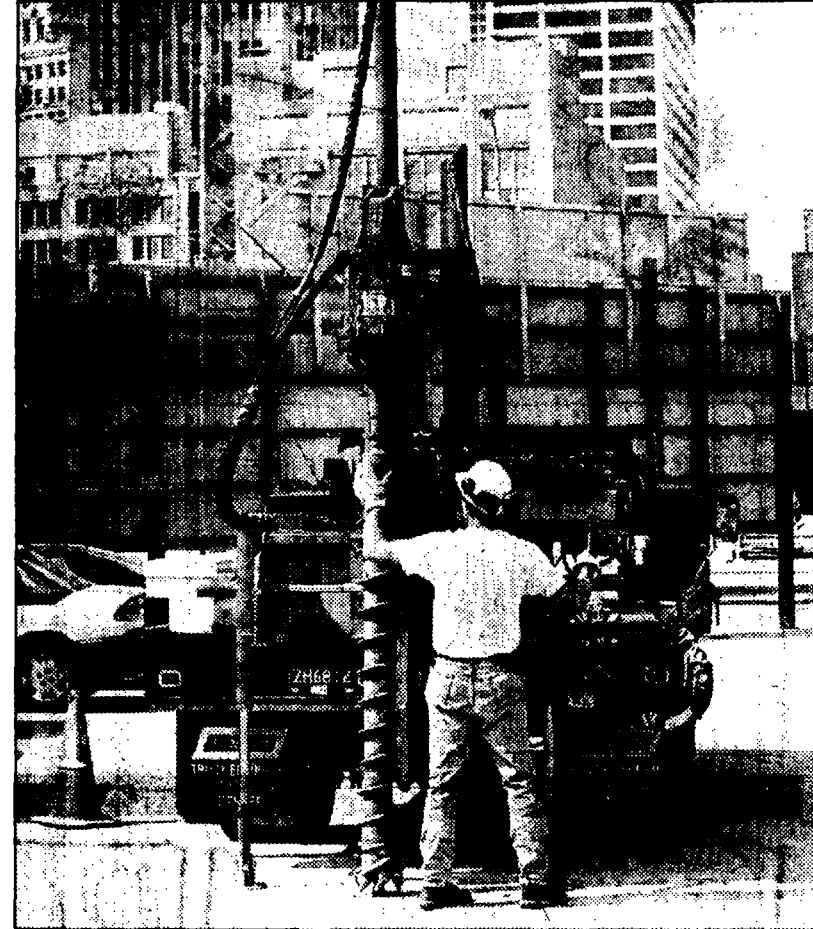
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parking space, his total exposure would be no more than the amount of radiation from a chest X-ray, the EPA said.

While there's little risk as long as the site remains a parking lot, the EPA notes that it is prime real estate. The agency worries that if ground were broken for housing or other development, radioactive dirt could contaminate workers, earth-moving equipment, neighbors and future users of the site.

"Let's make this site clean for future development," Perrecone said.

Chicago Dock and Canal said it plans to develop the property for office, residential or retail use.



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A consultant drills Monday for soil samples at a parking lot at 316 E. Illinois. Tests will determine how much dirt at the site is radioactive.

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